

WHAT IS ECOSOCIALISM?



by John Molyneux and Jess Spear

Jess Spear is a paleoceanographer and author of, amongst other things, 'A World of Change: Humans, Nature, and the Fight for Socialism During the Anthropocene', 'The Oceans: Past, Present and Future' and 'Poking the Angry Beast' a quarterly column on the science of climate change.

John Molyneux is a long standing socialist writer and author of 'Profit versus the Environment' (People Before Profit 2017), 'Apocalypse Now! Climate Change, Capitalism and Revolution', and 'Is there time for system change?'

Both Jess and John work together in the Global Ecosocialist Network.

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Introduction

The purpose of this pamphlet is to set out the concept and key ideas of ecosocialism, especially for those unfamiliar or new to this body of thinking. We particularly want to reach out to those who are appalled to witness our global society's headlong career towards climate catastrophe and mass extinction and who may be puzzled by its palpable unwillingness to apply the brakes to this disastrous descent and to those who recognise the absolute necessity of a just transition in the struggle for a non-fossil fuel dependent world. We maintain that averting catastrophe and achieving a more equal society involve first and foremost a challenge to capitalism.

The pamphlet is co-authored by Jess Spear and John Molyneux, who are respectively editors of the magazines, Rupture and the Irish Marxist Review. Rupture is an ecosocialist quarterly published by RISE (Revolutionary, Internationalist, Socialist, Environmentalist) and the Irish Marxist Review is a theoretical journal associated with the Socialist Workers Network which works within People Before Profit. This pamphlet represents a collaborative effort by the two journals. Both authors, both publications and both organisations are convinced advocates of the need for ecosocialist system change.

Jess Spear and John Molyneux

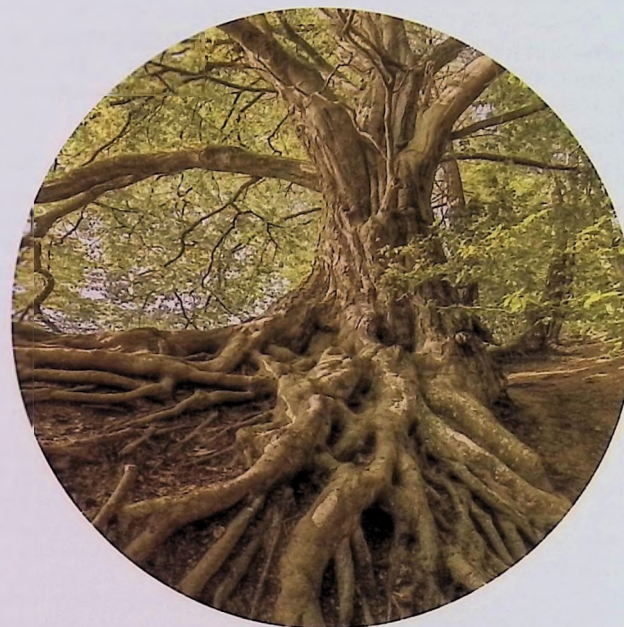
October 2020

What do we mean by ecosocialism?

We think ecosocialism is an idea whose time has come. What has brought this about is quite simply the current condition of the world we live in. We are living in a world characterised by three massive global crises: the Covid pandemic, the economic crisis, and the climate crisis. These are far from being the only issues. On the contrary it would be easy to fill many pages just listing vitally important issues - global inequality, imperialism and war, racism misogyny and gender oppression are the most glaring - but the three mentioned are interlocked and threaten the future of humanity. Ecosocialism represents a coherent but also an open response to all these connected crises.

Ecosocialism is based on three key principles: 1) the crises and main issues are all the product not of human nature, of the human race as a whole, or of individual ignorance and bad attitudes, but of the economic and social system of capitalism which completely dominates the world; 2) that the issue of climate change and the broader environmental crisis cannot be solved in isolation from the issues of class exploitation and oppression, and colonial, racial and gender oppression. Stopping climate change demands a just transition, and a just transition requires a fight for equality and social justice across the board; and 3) that the solutions to these crises are interconnected and socialist - they involve moving towards a society based on public ownership and democratic planning i.e., production for human need and ecological sustainability, not profit - and will therefore require mass mobilization.

Ecosocialism also involves a view of socialism that is fundamentally different from the anti-democratic police states of official Communism. Let's look at these points in turn.



“...at every step we are reminded that we by no means rule over nature like a conqueror over a foreign people, like someone standing outside nature - but that we, with flesh, blood and brain, belong to nature, and exist in its midst, and that all our mastery of it consists in the fact that we have the advantage over all other creatures of being able to learn its laws and apply them correctly.

- Friedrich Engels, The Dialectics of Nature, 1876

Climate change, covid and capitalism

On the surface and in the view of the mainstream media, the climate crisis and the Covid-19 crisis are unconnected. For ecosocialists, however, they are both symptoms of a profound dislocation in our society's relationship with nature.

In 1844 Karl Marx argued that capitalism alienated us from ourselves, our fellow human beings and from nature. This was because capitalism was based on alienated labour (labour sold as a commodity) and social labour was both what made us distinctive as humans and was the foundation of our relation with nature. This created a world in which we are dominated by the products of our own labour and produce in a way that takes no account of damage to the environment (see: Economic crisis and capitalism on page 12).

Later Marx's studies of capitalist agriculture and soil erosion led him to argue that for many thousands of years human beings, like all living creatures, had lived and developed through a metabolic interaction with nature. We "human beings live from nature, nature is our body, we must maintain a continuing dialogue with it if we are not to die. To say that our physical and mental life is linked to nature simply means that nature is linked to itself, for we are a part of nature."¹

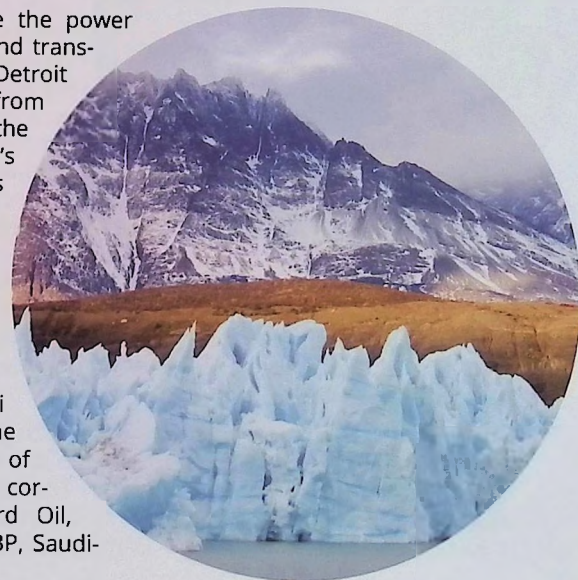
How we go about living - how our society organises the production of all that we need and want - governs the process by which we "mediate, regulate and control the metabolism between [ourselves] and nature."² This exchange with nature was broadly sustainable until the rise of industrial capitalism which necessitated enclosing the commons, forcing people off the land and into big factories, and giving way to intensive farming practices that quickly stripped the soil of nutrients. Capitalist production, wrote Marx, developed through robbing the two fundamental sources of wealth: the worker and the soil.³ The land was transformed from a source of food, clothing, and shelter, to a commodity itself and a source of raw materials to produce other commodities. Alongside that was imperialist expansion and the brutal destruction of indigenous peoples and their society-nature metabolisms. This continues today in the Amazon rainforest, in Africa, in Australia, everywhere there are minerals to mine or forests to clear that are occupied by people who have yet to be convinced of the sup-

posed superiority of capitalist production.

From its beginning capitalism had therefore created a profound distortion in this metabolic interaction, a 'rift' between humanity and our environment; and, the accumulation of destruction over time has led us to where we are now - climate change, species extinction, and ultimately civilisation in peril. In more recent times ecosocialist writers and thinkers such as John Bellamy Foster, Naomi Klein, Ian Angus, Michael Löwy, Sabrina Fernandes, Andreas Malm, Mike Davis and many others have built on these insights and developed them into what has become widely known as 'metabolic rift' theory.

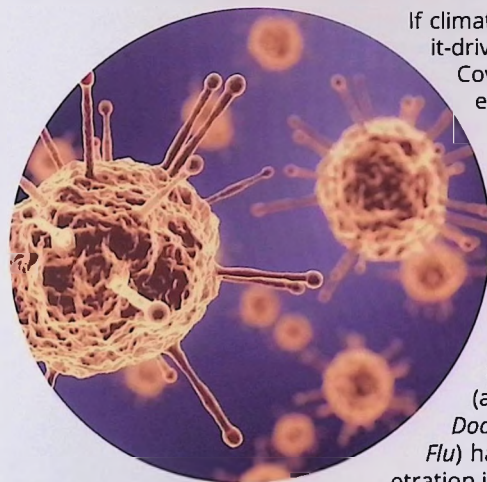
Historical research by Andreas Malm showed how in the industrial revolution in Britain, capitalism became dependent on coal-fuelled steam power - not for reasons of technological necessity, since there were alternatives such as water power available even then - but for reasons of profitability and in particular, a direct response to militant class struggle.⁴ In the course of the 19th and 20th centuries this dependency on fossil fuels, now including oil and gas, developed into a global addiction which continues to this day.

Fossil fuels became the power source of factories and transport systems from Detroit to Guangdong, from Seoul to Sao Paulo; the driver of the world's biggest armies, fleets and air forces; the motive of innumerable destructive wars; the source of the greatest personal fortunes from the Rockefellers and the Mellons to the Saudi Royal Family; and the foundation of many of the world's biggest corporations - Standard Oil, ExxonMobile, Shell, BP, Saudi-



Aramco, General Motors, Ford, Toyota, Volkswagen, China Sinopec etc.

Such was the addiction that even when the scientific evidence for the greenhouse effect and its catastrophic consequences became unequivocal, capitalism could not stop. Its first instinct was to ignore and deny. When that was no longer possible, it switched to delay, confuse and greenwash. Even now after the 12 year warning from the 2018 IPCC Report³ it can't stop mining coal, drilling for oil and gas, destroying the rainforest and laying new pipelines whether it is in Tar Sands or the Amazon, Australia or off the coasts of Ireland.



If climate change is the result of profit-driven addiction to fossil fuels, Covid is the result of profit driven expansion of giant farms, huge agribusiness, hideously cruel farming methods and ruthless encroachment into the wild. Radical epidemiologists and ecosocialist scientists such as Rob Wallace (author of *Big Farms Make Big Flu: Dispatches on Influenza, Agribusiness, and the Nature of Science*) and Mike Davis (author of *The Monster at our Door: The Global Threat of Avian Flu*) have shown that capitalist penetration into the wild increases the like-

lihood of zoonotic transmission (the leap of deadly viruses from animals to humans) and that mass industrialised farming and globalised food distribution further facilitate their spread. Covid-19 is, therefore, not the first immensely dangerous virus and will not be the last.

Capitalism has not only caused these catastrophes but is also a huge obstacle to dealing with them. This is true in a multitude of ways but let's just take two simple examples: 1) The whole world is waiting, hoping for a vaccine but there are 99 different agencies competing – not cooperating, competing – in the search for the vaccine, each

hoping to corner the market, 2) From both a health point of view and a climate change point of view less flying is a necessity but from a capitalist standpoint less flying is 'damaging to the economy' i.e., to the profits that make a capitalist economy tick. So what is the outcome? The public health advice is not to take foreign holidays; Ryanair fills the airwaves with adverts for special offers; and the government issues statements full of mixed messages.

But these are just instances of a tension that runs across the board between the needs of people and life on the planet and the priorities of capitalism.

Economic crisis and capitalism

The Covid pandemic has triggered an immense global economic crisis, probably the worst recession since the 1930s. During the lockdowns, output in most economies will be found to have fallen by a quarter according to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), with the effects felt in sectors amounting to a third of GDP in the major economies. For each month of containment, there is an estimated loss of 2 percentage points in annual GDP growth.⁶ International Monetary Fund (IMF) chief, Kristalina Georgieva, projects that "over 170 countries will experience negative per capita income growth this year". Investment bank JPMorgan's economists predict that the pandemic will cost the world at least \$5.5 trillion in lost output over the next two years, greater than the annual output of Japan. And that would be lost forever. That is almost 8 percent of GDP through to the end of next year. The cost to developed economies alone will be greater than that lost in the recessions of 2008-9 and 1974-5 combined. In Ireland the Department of Finance predicts for 2020 a decline in private investment of 37.3%, in personal consumption of 14.2%, in employment of 9.3% and in GDP of 10.5%.⁷

And we know from long historical experience that in recessions, while the super rich are protected or even prosper, it is the working classes, the poor and the oppressed, who are expected to pay the price. It is they who suffer the mass unemployment that becomes endemic in any recession and who are on the receiving end of the cuts in benefits and services inflicted as "we" all have to tighten our belts'.

In Ireland the wage share of workers fell from 53% of GDP in 2008 to 40% in 2016 and overall wage costs fell by 8% while profits increased by 8.25%. As a consequence, the proportion of people suffering deprivation rose from 22% to 30% and those in consistent poverty rose from 6% to 9%.

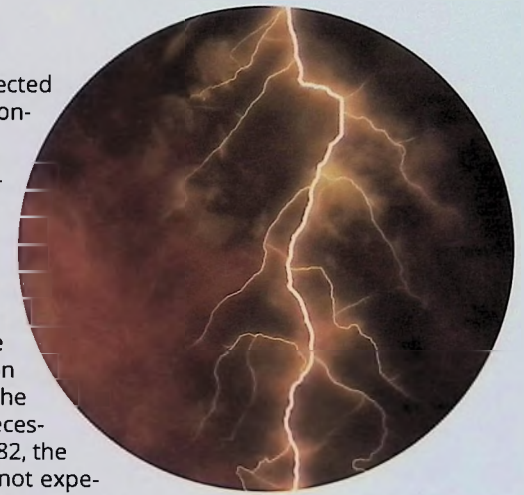
Several points should be made about this. The first is that the 'trigger' of a major historical development is not the same as its underlying cause. The First World War was triggered by the assassination of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo but its real cause was the rivalry between major imperial powers that had built up over decades. In the case of this global recession the trigger was Covid but the

crash had been widely expected and predicted by many economists for some time.

The second is that capitalism as an economic system has a built-in tendency toward periodic economic crises and it lives through alternating cycles of booms and slumps. Take witness the great depression of the 1930s, the boom of the fifties and sixties, the recessions of 1974-76 and 1980-82, the boom of the mid-eighties (not experienced in Ireland), the recession of 1991-93, the boom of the nineties and early noughties, the dot-com bubble bursting in 2000-2001, and the great recession of 2008-9, followed by a slow and uneven 'recovery'. In times of boom, the capitalists rush to invest in a mad scramble for profits (e.g., in property development during the Celtic Tiger) but they overextend themselves, the market becomes saturated and profits fall. Then investors panic and boom turns to slump.

The third is that from an ecological point of view such a system is a complete disaster. In the boom phase, capitalists fall over themselves to invest in new projects regardless of their environmental impact. In the slump, there is a panic and no money to devote to environmental concerns; the priority is to get back to economic growth. (This was the excuse given by the Green Party for the abandonment of its own environmental programme during its coalition with Fianna Fail in 2007-11 - 'we had to save the economy'.) On a global scale, an economic system that continues to oscillate between frenzied booms and catastrophic collapses is socially and ecologically unsustainable.

That is why we stand for an ecosocialist alternative in which production is based not on profitability but on the needs of humanity, the first of which is a planet fit for human habitation.



Ecosocialism is intersectional

Ecosocialism has compelling reasons for being emphatically intersectional. The system change required on a global scale to address the climate crisis and the wider environmental crisis means that we are committed to building a united mass movement for change on a national and international scale. The ecological crisis cannot be solved by piecemeal reforms on this issue or that issue, in this country or that country. But long experience has shown that such unity is only possible on the basis of fighting all the different forms of oppression we suffer and which subjugate us to the environmentally destructive rule of capitalism.

It is not just a matter of morality and abstract principle, namely that racism, sexism etc. are wrong in themselves (though they certainly are) but rather that you can't fight capitalism and climate disaster without fighting racism, sexism and every other kind of oppression. Oppression is functional to capitalism. It intersects with exploitation systemically to support the continuing rule of capitalism and the perpetuation of the class system and all the environmental destruction that comes with it. For example, women's oppression provides a new generation of labour power in large part through free domestic labour and helps ideologically justify low pay for care work in general. This saves capitalists a load of money. So does racial discrimination in pay and working conditions.



As socialist and trade union organiser Jim Larkin said over 100 years ago, "an injury to one is an injury to all." It's not just a question of working class unity; racism, sexism, and LGBTQ+ oppression mean there is less possibility for huge parts of the working class to struggle if they have more insecure work, no free time due to caring responsibilities, and are generally downtrodden by being discriminated against.

All of this applies with particular force to the movement against climate change. We know for certain that while climate change ultimately threatens us all, its immediate victims will be disproportionately the poor and the peoples of the Global South, that is those who have done, and do, the least to generate it. This is firstly because the areas projected to get extremely hot for most of the year are concentrated in the Global South and in less developed countries⁸; and secondly, because these countries are less developed and therefore have fewer social supports and infrastructure to mitigate the harm, their ability to withstand hotter temperatures, dramatic shifts in weather patterns, and deadly extreme weather events is much weaker than the wealthier countries in the Global North. In short, more people in the Global South and in developing countries will suffer and die if we don't act quickly and take the steps necessary to assist their transition. There can be no effective solution to climate change that does not address the question of a just transition for the Global South.

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Of one thing we can be certain: climate change will mean, indeed already means, a huge increase in the number of climate refugees, of people displaced by virtue of their homelands becoming uninhabitable. How our societies respond to these refugees will be a crucial issue in determining whether climate change becomes a point of departure for the construction of a decent world or for a descent into barbarity.

At the same time, the immense inequality between the capitalist North and the Global South cannot be understood without considering the history of slavery, colonialism, empire, and racism. Historically speaking, racism developed as an ideological justification for slavery



and colonial conquest. The normalisation of racism continues to enable the super-exploitation of black and brown workers who generally receive lower wages and suffer worse working conditions, while also being more likely to be expropriated by landlords who charge extortionate rents for substandard accommodation, and banks who charge them higher interest rates. Additionally, capitalists use immigration as a way of increasing the labour supply at lower wages and then work to blame that desired effect on the workers themselves in order to sow division and resentment among the working class.

The effects of climate change are also deeply gendered. Large amounts of research have shown that the impact of so-called 'natural' disasters is substantially greater on women. Thus:

Natural disasters lower the life expectancy of women more than that of men. In other words, natural disasters (and their subsequent impact) on average kill more women than men or kill women at an earlier age than men. Since female life expectancy is generally high-

er than that of males, for most countries natural disasters narrow the gender gap in life expectancy. Second, the stronger the disaster (as approximated by the number of people killed relative to population size), the stronger this effect on the gender gap in life expectancy. That is, major calamities lead to more severe impacts on female life expectancy (relative to that of males) than do smaller disasters... Taken together our results show that it is the socially constructed gender-specific vulnerability of females built into everyday socio-economic patterns that lead to the relatively higher female disaster mortality rates compared to men.⁹

Following the catastrophic Asian Tsunami in 2004, estimates made based on the sex of survivors (for instance, by Oxfam International) suggest that around three times as many women as men perished.¹⁰ This is a pattern of inequality that is bound to be repeated in the numerous disasters that will accompany climate change. As we've already indicated above, the impacts of these disasters will be far more severe in the Global South than it will be in the relatively affluent North and constitutes yet another reason why ecosocialism, and indeed the whole climate movement, must be intersectional in its approach.

Ecosocialism is an ideological position rather than an organisation, so it is not easy to provide evidence of institutional practice as opposed to aspiration. However, the Global Ecosocialist Network (www.globalecosocialistnetwork.net), to which both RISE and People Before Profit members are affiliated, can serve as an example. Its founding principles state simply: 'We need a global mobilisation of people power. Such mobilisation requires a commitment to just transition... The united mobilisation we need also requires opposition to all racist, sexist, national, homophobic, and transphobic oppression'.

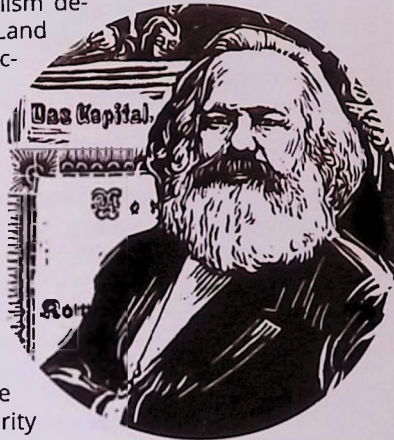
The general nature & dynamic of capitalism

Capitalism is all about profit. But what is profit? Where does it come from? And what is it about capitalism that leads to environmental destruction?

These are some of the questions Karl Marx answered in his book, *Capital*. In particular, Marx wanted to understand what lies behind the production of commodities, that is, all the goods and services bought and sold in society (from cars and computers to houses and holidays, toasters, tops, and toys). He wanted to understand how commodity production was organised, and what was behind the relations that it depends on, in particular worker/boss and buyer/seller. What conditions does it depend on?

The first condition on which capitalism depends is private property rights. Land (including all that's underneath it), factories, shops, machinery, technology (i.e., all the means of production) are privately owned. Private property rights seem like a no-brainer. Of course you should own your own home; it provides security and peace of mind. But what about owning millions of acres of land? What about privately owning all the machines and all the tools necessary to produce food, shelter, and safe clean drinking water? Private property rights mean the vast majority of people don't have free access to procure life's necessities.

The second condition necessary for capitalism is capital, or rather wealth to invest in production, to purchase land, buildings, machinery, and to hire workers. How did the early capitalists come to be so wealthy in the first place? Marx wrote about the 'primitive accumulation' of capital, the prehistory of capitalism which includes colonisation, outright theft of land, the enslavement of Africans and other



indigenous peoples and all the atrocities that went with it. As Marx remarked, "capital comes dripping from head to foot, from every pore, with blood and dirt."¹¹

Once the capitalists had the wealth and the right to seize and hoard for themselves all the tools needed to live, they then needed workers to put the tools in motion, to create commodities to be exchanged on the market. The theft of communal land and enclosure of small farms created the working class, a class in society who had to rent their capacity to work (i.e., their 'labour power') to the new businesses forming in order to buy life's necessities. This was never done freely – it was forced on people, and from the beginning some workers "regarded [factories] as a kind of prison, the interior sound and sights of the machinery at work being in some degree a terror to them."¹²

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Under the capitalist system, the working class does all of the work to produce all the stuff we buy, all the food and drink we consume, and all the housing and transport we need. But we don't control the production process, the capitalist does and it is their "right" to control what happens in that process and their interest (namely profit) they are looking after. They only invest their wealth to create more wealth, to accumulate more and more capital.

If capitalism depends on workers to produce goods and services, who produces the workers and how does this fit into capitalist production? All the cooking, cleaning, shopping for food and other necessities, having and raising children, as well as taking care of elderly family members is essential to maintaining the health of workers and producing a new generation fit for work. This 'care work' largely done in the home, usually by women, provides a massive subsidy to capitalist production. Indeed, a 2020 report by Oxfam estimated unpaid care work by women globally amounted to nearly \$11 trillion a year.¹³

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Our alienation from each other is, again, both a precondition and a consequence of capitalist relations. The workers, forced off the land, were then in competition with each other for jobs, for housing, and then for education, for healthcare, for car park spaces, for road space, and on and on. The coercion that compels us to work depends on and reinforces division, worker pitted against worker.

The alienation you experience from your labour stems from the fact that you are producing for someone else, under their direction and plan (more or less). The product you help to create you have no actual control over, no say in where it goes, what's done with it, who gets access to it. In that way your creative capacities are distorted, abused, and moulded for a purpose that not only do you not control, but actually controls you. The work to be completed when you enter the office, factory, or shop stands over you. The technology and machinery assisting production, while mechanically assisting your labour, also further controls how you do your work and with what rhythm and at what pace you work. Workers are therefore confronted in the workplace by alien forces that compel them to labour in certain ways. Marx concludes,

The worker therefore only feels himself outside his work, and in his work feels outside himself. He feels at home when he is not working, and when he is working he does not feel at home...Its alien character emerges clearly in the fact that as soon as no physical or other compulsion exists, labor is shunned like the plague.¹⁴

In short, capitalism has been built through the exploitation, oppression, and squandering of untold numbers of human lives. It required genocide and slavery, the wholesale destruction of ecosystems on land and water, and pollution at a scale that is difficult to grasp. To keep it going requires daily coercion, violence, degradation, and alienation of workers and the ongoing annihilation of nature. While we struggle to lessen the harm we experience under this system, includ-

ing the harm done to our environment both near and far, we must not ignore the simple fact that its brutality cannot be reformed away. The environmental catastrophe we face is rooted in the logic of capital accumulation: competition, expansion, and "production for production's sake."

Socialist solutions

Meeting the challenge of global climate change and the biodiversity emergency means cooperation and planning at an unprecedented scale, on a local, national, and international level. This goes completely against the capitalist system, where cutthroat competition and quarterly profits drive decision making. As long as capitalists are in the driver's seat, business-as-usual will reign. Indeed even after the Paris Climate Accord was agreed in 2015, 33 banks invested nearly \$2 trillion in fossil fuels, including \$600 billion earmarked for expanding fossil fuel use!¹⁵ Here in Ireland, where animal based agriculture is our top carbon emitting sector, the national dairy herd was increased by 400,000 cows.¹⁶

To assemble our forces into movements powerful enough to win, we have to start by rejecting the rules and logic of capitalism, and the ideas littering the pages of mainstream media on how markets can solve climate change. We have to firmly reject eco-austerity. Why should Ryanair get bailed out and fossil fuel corporations continue getting massive subsidies every year, while the rest of us have to pay yet another tax, yet another fee just to live? We must clearly stand against carbon taxes for workers. It is the big polluters who must pay.

At the same time, climate action has to be more than "saving the environment" and ensuring a safe future. It also has to ensure we're building a different society that delivers a better life.

Activists in America and across the world are rallying behind the demand for a 'Green New Deal' that targets both climate and social crises, aiming to reduce emissions as well as addressing the legacy of colonialism, slavery,



and genocide against indigenous peoples. A short animated video released in 2019, entitled 'A Message From the Future With Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez' showcases how Green New Deal policies could work to undo the harm to people and nature and help build a sustainable future. This is a massively positive step forward for the environmental movement, which for too long has focused on individual actions and lifestyle choices. We would take it a step further.

We need a Green New Deal that rejects the rules of capitalism and puts working people and the oppressed firmly in control over decision making. In short, we need a socialist Green New Deal. That means taking on the big corporations, big businesses, and big farms, challenging their right to decide our lives and our futures. Left to their own devices, we know where they would take us and we are already feeling the consequences.

Bringing these industries into public ownership to be run by workers, farmers, and the communities they serve means we control the land, machinery, technology and crucially the wealth produced. This will give us the resources we need to rapidly transition while ensuring a better life for all. It also means we don't have to pray and hope the market delivers what we need and want. We can democratically plan the transition together. With democratic control in the hands of working people and all those oppressed by capitalism we can ensure people's lives and our environment are at the heart of action.

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Democratically elected committees could be set up in every town, workplace, and farm to discuss what is needed to transition and how to ensure it's just, leaving no person and no community behind.

But we don't have to wait until we're powerful enough to wrest complete control from the capitalists. We can start by taxing their profits and using that money to implement rapid reductions in emissions. Oxfam reports that an additional tax of 0.5% on the richest 1% would produce enough money to create 117 million jobs.¹⁷ This is crucial because we don't have much time and wealthier countries, like Ireland,



must get to net-zero emissions faster than underdeveloped countries. 2050 is too late. We must aim for 2030.

At the same time, we should be clear that the capitalists and their political parties will not give up their power (nor agree even a minor increase in taxes) without a fight. A socialist Green New Deal must be combined with building our power in our communities and most importantly within our workplaces. That starts by recognising the potential power workers have. The mass movements around the water charges, Repeal, and Marriage Equality underscore a basic fact - when we stand together in our thousands and demand change, we can force the government to do what it doesn't want to. But we have more power than just taking to the streets on a Saturday afternoon. Since we do all the work, without our labour the profits stop flowing, the system shuts down. Going on strike in our workplaces is our most potent weapon against them. We'll need to learn to use this weapon more effectively through linking up with socialist trade unionists, organising more workers into trade unions, and taking the militant action necessary to force change now.

Secondly, we can rally our forces and build support for climate action by demanding what we need right here, right now - policies that target the inequalities baked into capitalism while also reducing emissions. For example, we can campaign for free, green, and frequent public transport, making transport accessible to all, incentivising the transition from single car use, saving lives, ending the traffic gridlock, and reducing emissions. Instead of concrete and roads, we could have green spaces everywhere, with towns and cities organised for pedestrians and cyclists, rather than cars. Our bin services, recycling, and composting should be brought back into public ownership and community control but with workers helping to plan out how to reduce waste and move towards a more circular economy.

We can start to combat the loss in biodiversity alongside reducing agricultural emissions by transitioning to regenerative farming practices and afforestation with native trees. We should pay small farmers to transition from beef and dairy and ensure they are part of democratically developing a plan for the transition. Alongside changes in farming and land use, we could launch education campaigns around how to garden and interact with nature in ways that benefit insects, amphibians, and small mammals.

Beyond changing what work we do, a better life would mean less work overall. A 4-day or 30-hour workweek would free up time for family and friends, community and political engagement, and cultural pursuits. With universal access to quality public healthcare, education, childcare, community kitchens and laundromats, we could relieve the double burden on families and women in particular, freeing up even more time for leisure and creative pursuits.

Some industries - notably fossil fuels - must be ended, while others are massively expanded, to build renewable energy infrastructure, retrofit houses and buildings, and importantly in care industries such as nursing, teaching, elderly care and childcare. Democratically elected committees could be set up in every town, workplace, and farm to discuss what is needed to transition and how to ensure it's just, leaving no person and no community behind.

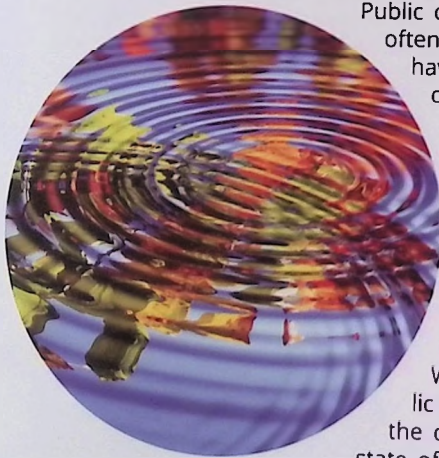
At the end of 'A Message from the Future' Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez appeals to the audience: "the first big step was closing our eyes and imagining it. We can be whatever we have the courage to see." Capitalism relies on and sows division, strife, deprivation, and more, holding us back from seeing what could be and what workers globally have the power to achieve together. If we have the courage to not only imagine a better future, but also to fight for it today, to organise and stand together where we can now, we have a chance to make our world anew, preventing climate catastrophe and preparing the way for a green socialist future.



Our vision of ecosocialism

Ecosocialists reject completely the model of 'socialism' that existed in Communist or Stalinist Russia, Eastern Europe and its offshoots in China, North Korea etc. Not only were these societies undemocratic police states with no regard for human rights, which failed miserably in terms of women's rights, LGBTQ+ rights and racial equality, they were also ecologically disastrous. Just like western capitalism they pursued fossil-fuel based industrial growth regardless of its impact on the environment. The terrible Chernobyl nuclear accident, the slow death of the Aral Sea (described by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon as 'clearly one of the worst environmental disasters in the world') as well as the appalling levels of air pollution in Chinese cities, are just the very visible tips of the environmentally toxic legacy of Stalinist relentless industrial growth.

In contrast, ecosocialism stands for a society that combines collective ownership and democracy, equality and freedom because only through such a combination can we overcome the metabolic rift with nature created by capitalism and establish a society that is environmentally sustainable.



Public ownership and democracy are often presented as antitheses which have to be traded off against each other. For ecosocialists they are a necessary condition of each other. Without public ownership of the main industries, banks, and financial operations there can be no real democracy because whatever parliament says or does real economic power remains in private hands. Without real democracy, public ownership will lead only to the dictatorship of unaccountable state officials and moreover, democ-

racy cannot apply only to parliament and local councils but must also operate in workplaces. Factories, data centres, banks, transport systems, hospitals, universities, schools – all these institutions should run under the democratic control of the people who work in them. The same will apply to local communities. Only in this way, through grassroots democratic control, will it be possible to make ecological awareness a part of every aspect of daily work and life.

Similarly equality and freedom are mutually necessary. Without equality, freedom is a myth. The rich and poor have equal rights to sleep in doorways and wait on trolleys. Without equality, that is with the division of society into rich and poor, the disadvantaged have no means of exercising their nominal freedoms in practice. Without free debate and discussion (by this we do not mean the right to hate speech and discrimination) some people will always be more equal than others.

It is not merely that these principles are morally right but that they have become ecologically essential. Take the question of economic growth. It is now certain that the escalating crisis of climate change and wider environmental crisis of the Anthropocene requires the abandonment of relentless economic growth and likely that it requires de-growth. But whereas mainstream (i.e., capitalist) economics operates with an undifferentiated, purely quantitative concept of growth and de-growth in terms of GDP, ecosocialism argues that it is necessary to distinguish between forms of production and consumption that are beneficial to the majority of people, that are conducive to a sustainable relation with nature (for example, the production of wind turbines and public transport infrastructure and the retrofitting of homes) on the one hand, and forms that are environmentally damaging or benefit only the super rich (for example armaments production, supercharged sports cars, luxury hotels and tourist resorts) on the other. The former need to be expanded and the latter 'de-grown' i.e. discontinued entirely. This distinction is particularly necessary when it comes to consumption.

Claims that human consumption must be reduced should not be made in a blanket way when 'under-consumption' in the most basic sense of malnutrition and severe poverty is the situation of a huge proportion of the world's population including many in the Global North, while obscene levels of over consumption are practiced by



a tiny minority at the top. Also, while ecosocialism might mean less consumption of MacDonald's burgers, private yachts, and ever more complex smartphones, it would mean a better life for the vast majority in terms of housing for all, a decent health service, improved education, shorter hours and longer life expectancy.

But these changes cannot be achieved or managed in a non-calamitous way without public ownership and real democratic planning. To take an obvious example: we cannot possibly restrict climate change without drastically reducing the use of private cars. If this is done under private ownership without a planned economy it will throw hundreds of thousands of workers onto the dole – not only car workers but steel workers, engineering workers, electronics workers, sales workers, mechanics and countless others who are dependent on the

motor industry. The same will apply to the oil industry.

Another key feature of ecosocialism is its internationalism. One aspect of this, widely accepted in the contemporary climate movement, is the commitment to international climate justice. Five hundred years ago the world constituted a more or less level playing field with no large gap between the economic development or living standards of Europe, Asia, Africa and the Americas. Five hundred years of capitalism, colonialism and imperialism have produced a grossly unequal world in which the human price for greenhouse gas emissions will be borne first and foremost by those regions and countries least responsible for them. There is no way that this gross injustice can be remedied except on an ecosocialist basis; it cannot be done within the framework of private ownership and the capitalist market.

But ecosocialist internationalism goes beyond that, beyond attempting to level the disparity between the Global South and the Global North. It actually envisages transitioning to an international society.

There has been a long standing debate in the socialist movement about the possibility of creating a socialist society in one country. Marx and Engels in the mid-nineteenth century argued that it would not be possible but most reformist Labour Party or Social Democratic socialists tended to believe it would be possible to achieve a socialist Britain or a socialist France, Germany or Ireland within the framework of the existing national state and adopted that as their goal. This was also one of the main disputes between Stalinism and Trotskyism during and after the 1920s, with Leon Trotsky taking the internationalist line. But today's global environmental crisis has added a totally new dimension to this debate.

We could be as equal, as carbon neutral and as environmentally conscious as can be imagined in Ireland or even in China but if business as usual continues in the US, Russia, India, Western Europe and the rest of the world, global warming will continue for all of us and all our fates will be sealed. The same applies to the plastification, acidification and other pollution of the oceans, to the destruction of the rainforests, to the loss of biodiversity and virtually every other ecological problem.

Capitalism is by its nature nationalistic and organised into competing nation states in a way that continually frustrates even a coordinat-

ed international response to the Covid emergency. There is no way it can achieve the international solidarity required to meet the environmental crisis.

An ecosocialist internationalist perspective is also essential for dealing with what is already and will be in the future, a major consequence of climate change, namely a huge increase in climate refugees. At the moment, the category of climate refugee is not even legally recognized but the fact is that as temperatures rise, ever greater swathes of the planet will become unlivable and people will have no choice but to migrate.

Essentially there will be two possible responses to this situation: first, the all too familiar nationalist, racist, even fascist response which says build walls, fences, concentration camps and let them drown or starve because we have to 'look after our own first'. Second, an internationalist and humanitarian response which says 'refugees are welcome here'. Achieving the second response, as opposed to the barbarity of the first, will require an ecosocialist transformation of society that simultaneously addresses the inevitable issues of unemployment, homelessness and inequality. The answer to Irish/French/German jobs/homes for Irish/French/German people must be jobs/homes for all and only socialist planning can offer that.

In short, nothing less than international ecosocialism will meet the challenge of our times. This doesn't mean that we should expect the whole world to go ecosocialist at once. That is very unlikely to occur but it does mean that if a bridgehead for ecosocialism were to be established in one country, whether it was in Ireland or Brazil or wherever, it would be necessary to spread it to other countries as quickly as possible. And recent history, with for example the rapid international spread of Greta Thunberg's calls for climate strikes and of the Black Lives Matter movement, shows that in today's globalised world this would be an achievable goal.

What distinguishes the approach and vision of ecosocialism from what might be considered the more 'mainstream' and dominant strands of the environmental and climate change movement - the likes of Friends of the Earth, War on Want and the Green Party - is that while the latter believe that catastrophic climate change and a sustainable future can be realised by bringing about a collective 'change

of heart' within the existing economic system and state framework, ecosocialists believe that what is needed is a fundamentally different society based on a sustainable relation to nature and production for human need not profit.



Endnotes

- 1 Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*.
- 2 Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, chapter 7.
- 3 Ibid, chapter 15.
- 4 Malm, Andreas, *Fossil Capital: The Rise of Steam Power and the Roots of Global Warming*. London, Verso, 2016.
- 5 See <https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/>
- 6 <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-oecd-economy/each-month-of-lockdown-in-major-economies-to-shave-two-percentage-points-off-growth-oecd-idUSKB-N21E1GZ>
- 7 This has since been revised down sharply. Multinationals are performing more strongly than expected, for tax driven reasons, while the domestic economy remains very weak.
- 8 <https://www.pnas.org/content/117/21/11350>
- 9 Eric Neumayer and Thomas Plumper, 'The Gendered Nature of Natural Disasters: The Impact of Catastrophic Events on the Gender Gap in Life Expectancy, 1981–2002'. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1111/j.1467-8306.2007.00563.x>
- 10 <https://www.globalfundforwomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2006/11/disaster-report.pdf>
- 11 Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, chapter 31.
- 12 Malm, Andreas, 2016. *Fossil Capital*, ch 6, p 129.
- 13 <https://www.oxfam.org/en/not-all-gaps-are-created-equal-true-value-care-work>
- 14 Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, see 'Estranged labour'.
- 15 <http://priceofoil.org/2019/03/20/report-banks-poured-1-9-trillion-into-fossil-fuels-since-paris-agreement/>
- 16 <https://www.ifa.ie/sectors/dairy/dairy-fact-sheet/>
- 17 <https://www.oxfam.org/en/press-releases/worlds-billionaires-have-more-wealth-46-billion-people>

Contact Us

Irish Marxist Review - www.irishmarxistreview.net
info@irishmarxistreview.net

Join People Before Profit at <https://www.pbp.ie/join/>

Rupture - Rupture.ie

ecosocialistquarterly@gmail.com

Find out more about RISE at letusrise.ie

In its incessant quest for profits and unending growth, capitalism is destroying nature, disrupting climate, and violently exploiting and oppressing workers, small farmers, and poor people globally. The solution, we argue, is ecosocialism. Here we outline the basic ideas and principles of ecosocialism, and how it can help build people-powered movements to challenge and ultimately end a system that puts profit before people and planet.

